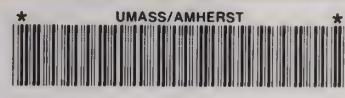


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NMCOG

Northern Middlesex Council Of Governments



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1991 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE

NORTHERN MIDDLESEX COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

A Multi-Purpose
Regional Planning
District Serving:

- Billerica
- Chelmsford
- Dracut
- Dunstable
- Lowell
- Pepperell
- Tewksbury
- Tyngsborough
- Westford

The Northern Middlesex Council of Governments is a district planning council, a public body corporate, formed by the enabling legislation of Chapter 40B of the Massachusetts General Laws and governed by a policy board of local elected officials. The member municipalities of Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Dunstable, Lowell, Pepperell, Tewksbury, Tyngsborough and Westford are each represented on the Council by a member of the Board of Selectmen or City Council, Planning Board, and an alternate member appointed by the Selectmen, or, in the case of Lowell, by the City Manager.

The Northern Middlesex Council of Governments maintains a staff of professional planners to assist in developing and implementing its policies. The Council meets monthly on the third Wednesday of the month at its offices at 35 Market Street in Lowell. All Council meetings are open to the public.

By statute, the Council is required to "make careful studies of the resources, problems, possibilities and needs of its district, and on the basis of such studies, shall prepare a comprehensive plan of development or schematic study plan of such district or of such part or parts thereof as the Council may deem necessary and in such plans shall make recommendations for the physical, social, governmental or economic improvement of the district....".

Assessments upon the member communities are made on an equal per capita basis and are used to provide the "local share" of various projects undertaken by the Council with Federal funds and local assistance. These funds enable the Council to undertake far more staff work than would otherwise be possible at the present level of local assessment (less than \$.26 per capita). Approximately nineteen percent of the Council's FY '92 budget consists of local assessment funds. The current Council budget is \$355,800.

Steven C. Boudreau
Chairman

Robert W. Flynn
Executive Director

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The Council maintains an interest in and actively involves itself in most nonsocial or health related subject areas. Major ongoing projects are concerned with transportation and transit planning, water supply and water quality issues, land use planning and zoning related issues, solid waste and recycling, housing, historic preservation and technical assistance on a host of municipal management issues.

The Council also maintains a significant data library and serves as an Affiliate Data Center with the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. As the Metropolitan Planning Organization for Transportation, along with the Lowell Regional Transit Authority and the Massachusetts Department of Public Works, the Council plays a major role in identifying, planning and prioritizing major federally supported transportation projects in the Region.

TRANSPORTATION

Highway Planning

Each year the Council devotes a large portion of its efforts to transportation issues. In cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration and the Massachusetts Department of Public Works, the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments continues to focus on traffic problems and concerns across the region.

The NMCOG administers the regional transportation program through the following activities: conducting planning studies to determine the appropriate solutions to transportation problems; bringing local needs to the attention of State and Federal officials; providing technical assistance to member communities; and preparing and maintaining a regional transportation data base.

Over the past year the NMCOG has undertaken traffic studies along Bridge Street (Route 38) in Lowell and Dracut, Route 113 in Tyngsborough, Dunstable, and Pepperell, and Route 110/113 in Dracut, Lowell and Tyngsborough. Each of these studies assessed traffic problems along major arterial routes of regional and local importance and presented alternative solutions aimed at resolving those problems.

The NMCOG staff continues to study the Route 38 corridor in Tewksbury and Lowell in light of recent development proposals in the vicinity of the I-495 interchange area. Currently the Council is undertaking a traffic planning study which will result in the creation of a plan allowing the Town of Tewksbury and the City of Lowell to determine the points at which it will become necessary to implement specific transportation improvements in

order to accommodate future growth and development. The ultimate goal in conducting such a study is to coordinate development and economic growth with planned or available transportation infrastructure and capacity.

The NMCOG staff continues to develop its traffic counting program. Each year counts are taken at over 100 locations throughout the region. This data is incorporated into a traffic count book and map series each year. The traffic counting program assists local communities in evaluating traffic conditions on local roadways and provides a valuable data base for future studies.

Reducing the number of single-occupant vehicles serves to enhance the efficiency of the regional roadway network. Such measures as ridesharing and using public transit reduce traffic congestion, energy consumption and air pollution. During 1991 the NMCOG conducted a survey to determine vehicle occupancy rates throughout the region. This information will be utilized to measure how the use of carpools and vanpools has changed over the years and to identify those areas where efforts to promote ride-sharing and transit service should be concentrated.

In a related study the Council has also examined possible potential locations for the establishment of Park and Ride lots. Such facilities, usually located in proximity to highway interchanges, provide a place for commuters to meet and share a ride to work.

To better anticipate future demands on our transportation system the NMCOG reviews many traffic and environmental impact reports prepared by private consultants for proposed developments in member communities. These reviews often occur in response to the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act (MEPA). The NMCOG also reviews smaller projects upon local request.

The NMCOG staff also provided technical assistance to local communities over the past year. The Council has assisted several communities in issues related to land use and zoning, traffic and the environment. The Council also provides demographic data and information to any of its member communities upon request. Area residents should feel free to contact NMCOG staff who will gladly either provide the necessary data or direct them to the proper source of information.

Transit

The Northern Middlesex Council of Governments' transit planning activities are funded both by the Federal Transit Administration and the Lowell Regional Transit Authority. This year's work program continued to provide a high level of direct technical assistance to the Lowell Regional Transit Authority.

Statistical Reporting

NMCOG staff monitors and records statistical information relative to LRTA ridership and cost data. This information is updated and compiled annually into a volume that provides historical information on LRTA performance in five basic categories:

1. Elderly and Handicapped Service FY '82 to the present
2. Fixed Route Bus Service FY '80 to present
3. Quarterly Ridership Counts FY '83 to present
4. Commuter Rail Ridership FY '75 to present
5. Gallagher Terminal Parking FY '84 to present

Charles A. Gallagher Transportation Terminal Addition

The Charles A. Gallagher Transportation Terminal addition, after several modifications, is now nearing completion in the Spring of 1992. The original public/private joint venture concept was put on hold when the economy went soft. The LRTA was able to proceed with the public portion of the project and NMCOG has prepared a marketing video and demographic information which combined with a brochure on the project will form the basis of a "development kit" which will be used in the future to solicit prospective private development. Perhaps one of the most significant changes from the NMCOG perspective is the creation of office space on the third level of the building to accommodate NMCOG offices. This "interagency" arrangement helps both NMCOG and the LRTA and provides convenient access and parking for the office. The new address will be 115 Thorndike Street late this spring or early summer.

Special Paratransit Services to the Elderly and Disabled

Over the past several years the NMCOG staff assisted the LRTA in the implementation of the ongoing 504 plan completed by NMCOG for LRTA in 1987. By 1992 every element on the five year plan was completed. In January of 1992 NMCOG staff and the LRTA completed a Complementary Paratransit Plan as required to implement the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This plan was overwhelmingly endorsed at a public hearing on January 8, 1992. High points of the program are 22 wheelchair accessible fixed route buses which will be put into service in April/May of 1992, and grant applications for additional paratransit "floater" vehicles to facilitate paratransit trips between communities. Paratransit hours are extended to the same as fixed route service hours and an ADA service area has been defined. This was accomplished without any decrease in the existing LRTA "Road Runner" paratransit service.

PROJECT REFERRALS

The Northern Middlesex Council of Governments performs a statutory review role for projects subject to the regulations of the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), projects subject to Federal Clearinghouse regulations, and bond issuances through the Massachusetts Industrial Finance Agency (MIFA).

While the Council's review function is exercised in only an advisory capacity, it nevertheless allows local officials and concerned citizens a vehicle through which to respond to and comment upon projects which may have a significant environmental impact in their communities.

During 1991 the Council reviewed 21 projects throughout the region with a total value of more than \$50,445,000. More than 33% percent of the projects for which an ENF was filed, were required to file an Environmental Impact Report to more fully address environmental issues of concern. Additionally, NMCOG reviewed and commented upon an Environmental Impact Report that was filed this past year for the Honeywell-Bull Corporate Office Park in Billerica, MA.

Also in 1991 NMCOG reviewed four applications requiring Federal Clearinghouse action which totalled nearly \$200,000. The Council also reviewed all State Agency Capital Outlay Budgets for consistency with regional and local planning.

THE ENVIRONMENT

The Merrimack River basin contains important natural resources that serve a multitude of uses. These uses place very different demands on the resources within the basin. In Massachusetts, the Merrimack River provides the second largest source of drinking water supply, serving over 300,000 people, while at the same time is used to assimilate wastewater from adjacent residential, commercial and industrial development.

The Northern Middlesex Council of Governments in order to address these issues has been working in a gradual progression through the use of the 205(j)/604(b) funding for the EPA. The FY '88 205(j) project entailed the mapping of underground storage tanks (USTs) in zones of contribution to public water supply wells. Development trends were also mapped in the Zone IIs. This project focused upon all of the region's communities that are served by public supply wells. They are: Chelmsford, Dracut, Dunstable, Pepperell, Tewksbury, Tyngsborough and Westford. Along with the report that analyzed the mapped information, a seminar was held for local officials on groundwater protection.

The FY '89 205(j) project completed in December of 1990 was a septage management study for the NMCOG region. This project was aided by the creation of the Septic Management Advisory Committee, organized by the NMCOG and made up of local Board of Health Officials, septage haulers, and Department of Environmental Protection officials. The report analyzed the current method of dealing with septage within each community, the volumes generated during 1990 as well as quantities likely over the next 15 years, and current capacities at several treatment facilities that handle septage. Alternative management approaches were discussed for a long term solution to the treatment problems.

The FY '90 205(j) project slated for completion in April 1992 is a cooperative effort between the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments and the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission. This project entails the identification and mapping of water resources within each region that are shared by two or more municipalities, as well as the identification of potential risk sources. The final product will be the development of a "Memorandum of Agreement" similar to the Barnes Aquifer Agreement that will be uniform throughout the entire Merrimack Valley.

Another water protection project currently underway is an extension of the FY '90 project, with greater emphasis on the implementation of proposed protection measures. This is to be achieved through support for the permanent Regional Water Protection Committee, and working relations with the individual water suppliers. These latest projects not only work toward stronger cooperation within the NMCOG region, but also within the entire Merrimack Valley. A the joint resolution signed between the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments and the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission regarding "the use, improvement and preservation of the Merrimack River as a natural resource" (January 17, 1991) formalizes a greater regional role in regards to the Merrimack River.

This cooperative effort is being further strengthened by the U.S. Environmental Agency, Merrimack River Initiative emergency response grant recently awarded to the four planning agencies along the Merrimack River (Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission and Nashua Regional Planning Commission in New Hampshire, and the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments and Merrimack Valley Planning Commission in Massachusetts). The goal of this effort will be the development of an Emergency Response Plan for the communities along the main stem of the Merrimack River.

Two characteristics of the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments set it apart from all other Regional Planning Commissions in the Commonwealth. First, it is the only such Council by statute to require representation by the member communities' chief elected officials, a characteristic that dramatically improves the level of communication and coordination at the local level. Secondly, recent enactment of Chapter 420 of the Acts of 1989 now allows the Council to perform a wide variety of non-planning functions on behalf of its members. To better reflect this current organization of the District and its ability to provide a broader range of services to its members, the Commission has voted to change from the Northern Middlesex Area Commission effective September 20, 1990. The District now stands unique in the Commonwealth.

Increasingly, all sectors of our society need to better manage and utilize our scarce resources prudently and effectively. Plans must be carefully focused in order to bring about investments and programs that support and enhance a wide range of objectives. The Council recognizes its responsibility to help translate plans into action through providing technical assistance to member communities in designing, facilitating and implementing programs and projects which further regional interests.

The keys to the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments' approach are coherence and balance. Through the give and take of intermunicipal cooperation, the Council attempts to link, rationalize, shape and adapt the characteristic issues, problems, and opportunities of the region to a common end.

1991 Council Officers and Representatives for 1991/1992

Community	Representing	
Billerica	Dianne Bonnell	Planning Board
	Arthur L. Doyle	Board of Selectmen
	Ann M. Mulcahy	Alternate
Chelmsford	Eugene E. Gilet	Planning Board
	Henrick R. Johnson, Jr.	Board of Selectmen
	Bernard F. Lynch	Alternate
Dracut	Rosemarie Sdoia	Planning Board
	Warren L. Shaw, Jr.	Board of Selectmen
	Frank J. Gorman	Alternate
Dunstable	Judith Larter	Planning Board
	Walter Alterisio	Board of Selectmen
	Richard P. Henry, Jr.	Alternate
Lowell	George Zaharoolis	Planning Board
	Bernard Lemoine	City Council
	Michael J. Farnum	Alternate

Pepperell	Ronald D. Karr	Planning Board
	Carol M. Case	Board of Selectmen
	Patricia A. Hamilton	Alternate
Tewksbury	Cheryl Busch	Planning Board
	Thomas Camara	Board of Selectmen
	David Cressman	Alternate
Tyngsborough	Roger DeCelles	Planning Board
	Real R. Turcotte	Board of Selectmen
	Rick McCullough	Alternate
Westford	Peter Fletcher	Planning Board
	Robert C. Herrmann	Board of Selectmen
	Steven C. Boudreau	Alternate

Council Staff 1991/1992

Robert W. Flynn, Executive Director
 Linda C. Bendzewicz, Bookkeeper
 Christopher Curry, Comprehensive Planner
 Timothy D. Goddard, Senior Planner
 Andrew E. Motter, Associate Planner
 Lorette Richards, Office Manager
 Carol A. Stark, Senior Secretary
 Beverly A. Woods, Assistant Director

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